

What about drugs or other substances?



The aim of the Alcohol Reforms is to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.

Volatile substance misuse

Volatile substance misuse (VSM), particularly petrol sniffing, is a complex issue. The Queensland Government is working with communities to find an approach that will work for their area.

Facts

- The prevalence of young people misusing volatile substances can fluctuate due to a range of factors, including school holidays, peer exposure, involvement in other sport and other activities, weather changes, significant community events and police activity.
- VSM in Queensland is undertaken predominantly by young people 12 to 18 years of age. However, children under the age of 10 and young people up to 25 have also been involved in VSM.

What options are available for Council to help to tackle this issue?

Indigenous Councils can proactively respond to the misuse of volatile substances by working closely with local police to:

- **seek a declaration for 'places of safety'** (particular streets or even the entire community) under the *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000*. A demonstrated need for this action would need to be established.
- **use existing powers** under the *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000* and 'move on' users and to search and seize 'potentially harmful things'. In the current declared places in Queensland (inner Brisbane, Logan, Townsville, Cairns, Mount Isa, Rockhampton and Caboolture) police also have the additional powers to detain a person who is suspected of using these substances, and to take them to a place of safety.

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- **Educating business owners within the community and in surrounding areas** about VSM. Under Section 23 of the *Summary Offences Act 2005*, it is an offence for a retailer or salesperson to knowingly sell a 'potentially harmful thing' (such as glue, paint, a solvent, or methylated spirits) to a person the seller would reasonably expect to inhale or ingest 'the thing'.

Some retailers in surrounding areas have agreed to **withdraw potentially harmful items from display shelving inside their stores** and place them in a separate room at the rear of premises, along with glues, solvents and paints previously removed from display.

Retailers should inform their employees of the provisions of the Act with a view to compliance with this legislation. For identification purposes, retailers may wish to label bottles of methylated spirits sold so that they can be identified as being sold by their store. This will assist investigators when locating methylated spirits, in identifying place of purchase.

- **Exploring the availability of OPAL fuel to address petrol sniffing.** Known generically as 'OPAL', BP developed a fuel that does not contain lead and only has very low levels of the aromatic hydrocarbons, which give the 'high' sought by petrol sniffers. The eight communities participating to date have seen a reduction in the number of people sniffing petrol and in the incidence of juvenile crime. The scheme is supported by the federal government.
- **Encourage parents to be vigilant and seek assistance** for children and young people.

What is the government doing to address the wider issue?

- The **Addressing Volatile Substance Misuse initiative (AVSMI)** currently in place in seven locations across Queensland provides a referral point for police to enable young people to access supervised recovery. These services do not rely solely on police referrals. Organisations are encouraged to work collaboratively with police and to forge links with young people through active outreach, encouraging them to self-refer.
- In addition, the Queensland Government allocated \$4.35m to the **Alcohol and Other Substance Demand Reduction program**. This program complements supply reduction and harm reduction initiatives in the 19 Deed of Grant in Trust communities. The Alcohol and Other Substance Demand Reduction Program aims to divert people away from alcohol and other substance misuse by providing family and youth activities such as sport, recreation, arts and cultural activities.